

A Qualitative Study of Reproductive Health Education Among the Medical Students of Karachi

Saher Mushtaque¹, Riaz Ahmed Bhutto², Muneer Sadiq³, Syed M. Maqsood² and
Qurat-ul-Ain Khan⁴

ABSTRACT

Objective: This study was to explore the need for reproductive health education among medical students as the students are ignorant regarding the education of reproductive health before their marriages.

Study Design: Qualitative exploratory study

Place and Duration of Study: This study was conducted at the Sir Syed Medical College for Girls, and Al-Tibri Medical College and Hospital. Karachi, from March to July 2020.

Materials and Methods: This study was conducted among the medical students from two different Institute. The studied sample consisted of students of all the medical years. We conducted a total of 14 focus groups and 12 in-depth interviews. Hence, a purposive sampling technique was used to collect the data. The content analysis method was used to analyze the data. According to the perceptions of participants, various themes were identified, such as (1) lack of reproductive health knowledge, (2) barriers to avail reproductive health services, (3) consequences of an individual and (4) social-cultural consequences.

Results: Twenty-six medical students, both married and unmarried, were included belonging to the age group of 18–25 years were interviewed. A lack of knowledge regarding sexual reproductive health was seen among the medical students of Karachi. Girls and women in our country hardly learn from their parents and teachers regarding reproductive health.

Conclusion: The need for reproductive health education was being prioritized by most of the participants, not because of the diseases associated with reproductive health but also because of other issues individuals face.

Key Words: Reproductive health education, Medical students, Qualitative study

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INTRODUCTION

According to the World health organization (WHO), reproductive health education is defined as “a state of physical, emotional, mental and social well-being; it is not merely the absence of disease, dysfunction or infirmity in all matters relating to the reproductive system and to its functions and processes. If reproductive health to be attained and maintained, the rights of reproductive health of all persons must be respected, protected and fulfilled.” (WHO, 2006a)

¹. Department of Community Medicine, Sir Syed College of Medical Sciences, Karachi.

². Department of Community Medicine / Medicine³, Al-Tibri Medical College, Karachi.

⁴. Department of Anatomy, Sir Syed Medical College for Girls, Karachi.

Correspondence: Dr. Saher Mushtaque, Senior Lecturer, Department of Community Medicine, Sir Syed College of Medical Sciences, Karachi.

Contact No: 0335-3611927

Email: dr.saher83@gmail.com

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The main idea of reproductive health education is to spread the information and motivate people to enhance their reproductive health by implementing different types of informative activities¹. Through this effective reproductive health education, one can prevent diseases and help live a healthy lifestyle². With time, the need for reproductive health education has been rising, and it is also considered a fundamental human right by most international organizations³. Hence, where the community emphasizes its need, the community has to go through its challenges due to the orthodox mindset of the society and cultural barriers, specifically in South Asia and its neighbouring countries⁴. In Pakistan, reproductive health is considered a social taboo because of cultural traditions and norms. The people of Asia think providing information regarding reproductive health at an early age may lead to various problems such as it can ruin the innocence of children at an early age⁵. Most South Asian countries do not have a proper platform for reproductive health education, along with a lack of knowledge regarding main reproductive functions, contraception, and other associated diseases⁶. One of the qualitative studies was conducted in Iran in which girls were unaware of the changes that take place during puberty, and they found their experience very

unpleasant⁷. Another qualitative study was conducted among girls college of Saudi Arab which also revealed that they had no idea of menarche. They also showed their negative perception of the process of puberty⁸. Hence in Pakistan, various studies have proved that students have poor knowledge regarding reproductive health. For this purpose, a qualitative study was conducted among the medical students of Karachi to explore the need for reproductive health education among medical students.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

A qualitative exploratory design was conducted from March-July 2020, among 50 medical students through purposive sampling technique from different institutes. Out of which 25 were FGD's and 25 were IDI's. Only those students who were interested were included and those who were not willing to participate were excluded from the study. A digital voice recorder was used to record the interviews of the participant between 45–60 minutes. The data was organized, coded and then categorized so that the themes could be extracted. All Ethical issues have been well-thought-out.

RESULTS

Lack of reproductive health knowledge: Our study revealed that lack of reproductive health knowledge is mainly due to lack of formal education in communities, and homes. The participants were shy to share their problems with their parents as well. In this regard, one of the participants stated that

"Health system of Pakistan is still far behind in terms of reproductive health education. No one in our society is considering this issue as an important element of our lives" (IDI, Final year Medical student).

"Most Asian families specifically in Pakistan are ashamed of talking about reproductive health issues with their children; if children ask something out of curiosity, parents pretend they have no idea what their children are talking about or at times they change the topic immediately and start asking them other things unrelated to it, because they believe that children should remain stay away from such type of education and awareness as it would create problems for them and become hard for the parents to control them" (FGD, all years of Medical students)

Another finding of our study revealed that one of the reasons for the lack of reproductive health information among most of the participants was the lack of knowledge provided by the teachers. They emphasized that reproductive health education should be part of the curriculum in schools like in western countries. As one of the participants stated that;

"Almost all schools have specialized faculty and qualified teachers; but, topics related to reproductive health education were not included in the syllabus and

also staff and faculty does not have adequate knowledge " (FGD, Final year, Medical students)

Table No.1: The main five themes and their sub-themes were identified in this study

Themes	Sub-themes
Lack of reproductive health knowledge	Lack of proper education, availability of reliable sources, lack of education from elders and teachers
Barriers to avail reproductive health services	lack of policies, lack of social and cultural support, pricey consultation, lack of qualified workforces, lack of insurance policies for consultation
Challenges of Individual in the society	increase in the divorce rate, helpless feeling, negative impact in the relationship
Socio-cultural consequences	The idea of modern and traditional world, lack of religious knowledge, obsession to media

Barriers to avail reproductive health services: The results of this study revealed that the participants were concerned regarding the barriers faced by the people during the provision of reproductive health services. The main reason was the lack of priority of policy-making, lack of social support due to which there were no services available. One of the participants stated that:

"Many of the problems faced by the society was related to lack of support system " (IDI, Third year, Medical students).

Another important finding of the study revealed that the culture inhibits society from developing a proper channel for reproductive health services. The participants mentioned that the social stigma of these services has made their availability impossible for the community. One of the participants stated that:

"Many people in our society feel shy and avoid talking about reproductive health problems and they don't realize this was a natural process of the human body" (FGD, Final year, Medical students).

Another important finding revealed by the participants was the high cost of such consultation services. As one of the participants stated that,

"The consultation fees taken by the doctor was too high that they think doctors would not tell them something different, it was better to google instead of going to the doctors"(IDI, all years of Medical students).

Another important finding of the study revealed a lack of insurance coverage for consultations, and inadequate workforce as a result of which reproductive health was neglected. One of the participants stated that:

"For just few minutes consultation, had to pay so much money from our pocket and the government has not

provided us with any insurance cards" (FGD, Final year, Medical students).

Challenges of individuals in a society: Most medical students believed that divorce rate is increasing day by day. One of its leading causes was insufficient knowledge regarding reproductive health. One of the participants stated that:

"Reproductive health problems were one of the indirect causes of divorce as the couple felt uncomfortable to talk about their reproductive health in front of everyone because of the shame or at times they neglect such issues. However, it is undoubtedly hidden cause of divorce and leaves a negative impact in the relationship" (IDI, First year, Medical students).

"If a relationship between the couple was not healthy, the couple would lose interest towards each other and couple felt so helpless at such moments which would lead to emotional divorce" (FGD, Second year, Medical student).

Socio-cultural consequences: One of the findings of our study revealed that most of the participants believed that Pakistan is entering into modern world by forming big gap in terms of conventional practice and modernity. This modern culture has a significant influence on our personalities this was all due to weak religious beliefs. One of the participants stated that:

"Most of the people were confused between the modern and old culture. Now a day's people believe that everything should be open without any shame but when it comes to reproductive health, its always neglected" (FGD, Third year, Medical student)

Another participant mentioned that now a day's addiction of cell phones was harmful as its provide the information in the wrong manner. One of the participants stated that:

"They send private and vulgar photos to each other via applications such as face book and whatsapp". (FGD, First year, Medical student)

Another important finding of the study is the frequent availability of satellite channel as they show such modern things on TV which should not be allowed for kids to watch at home. As one of the participants stated that:

"The effect of satellite channels on our youth could not be ignored at any cost ; however, there are still some families in our cities who do not have satellite receivers, but still their kids go to school and could easily get harmful information. Hence this is the worst invention of this era for the new generation" (FGD, Final year, Medical students)

DISCUSSION

This was the first type of qualitative study conducted among the medical students of Karachi to emphasize the importance of reproductive health education among the masses. Hence, the data analyzed resulted in four main themes: lack of reproductive health knowledge, Barriers to avail reproductive health services, and challenges of Individual and socio-cultural consequences. The participants believe that one of the

reasons for socio-cultural norms faced by the Pakistani community in recent times was the difference between modern and old traditional mindsets. The transition of our society was due to western culture and ideas, which had a deep impact on the cultural and behavioural models, leading to various approaches to cater reproductive health problems⁹. Some participants believe that there was a big threat to reproductive health because of weak religious beliefs. Hence the results of our study were similar to another study.¹⁰ He also mentioned that deviation from reproductive health behaviour was due to a lack of religious beliefs. Another finding observed in our study was a decline in reproductive health education, as a result of which there was an increased incidence of reproductive health diseases, and it causes a negative impact on one's personality and relationship of a couple¹¹. Another frightening factor was addiction which threatens reproductive health¹². The findings of our study were similar to a study conducted by Gray et al.¹³ They also revealed that youth was exposed to false reproductive health information through TV channels. Worldwide different strategic planning has been done to prevent the youth from these newly emerging harms of technology, but, unfortunately, no particular plan has been developed in Pakistan. In our study, participants discussed that insufficient knowledge regarding reproductive health was also mentioned as one of the factors¹⁴⁻¹⁷. Hence, lack of formal education from parents, schools and teachers were the main causes of insufficient knowledge regarding reproductive health⁸. Unfortunately, in our society and many other cultures, parents do not feel comfortable discussing reproductive health issues with their children; due to which parents are not considered as an effective source of information, and they provide no support to their children regarding these issues, as a result of which children engage themselves into unreliable resources which creates misconceptions in their minds¹⁸ which were not healthy for their character building¹⁹. In the east, there was certain mindset regarding reproductive health which inhibits the youth to obtain information²⁰. Most of the participants in this study discussed the barriers which they faced during reproductive health education. Our findings were similar to another study conducted by Roudsari et al²¹; in this study, they revealed that there was a large gap when it comes to providing reproductive health services. In Pakistan, the biggest dilemma was that there was no formal education for reproductive health services for youth. According to another study conducted by Mitton et al²², reproductive health program also needs social support. Therefore, it is the duty of the policy-makers to implement reproductive health education as an integral part of the education system.

CONCLUSION

Although there were many barriers but that does not mean that reproductive health education would be impossible. The results of our study suggested that the

integration of reproductive health education into the pre-marital educational program could help in the promotion by creating awareness regarding reproductive health.

Author's Contribution:

Concept & Design of Study: Saher Mushtaque
 Drafting: Riaz Ahmed Bhutto, Muneer Sadiq
 Data Analysis: Syed M. Maqsood, Qurat-ul-Ain Khan
 Revisiting Critically: Saher Mushtaque, Riaz Ahmed Bhutto
 Final Approval of version: Saher Mushtaque

Conflict of Interest: The study has no conflict of interest to declare by any author.

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